

Mount Rushmore National Memorial News Release

Independence Day Celebration a Success at Mount Rushmore

(Keystone, SD) – On July 3, an emotionally moving ceremony to the last surviving South Dakota Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP) from World War II and the only known Native American WASP, Ola Mildred "Millie" Rexroat, and a spectacular live orchestra concert rounded out a full day of patriotic programs and activities at Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Visitors to the memorial celebrated Independence Day with patriotic tributes, educational interpretive programs, and cultural celebrations of American heritage.

Visitors began streaming into the memorial early in the day and continued late into the day as they took the opportunity to experience the memorial as one of the most important destinations while vacationing throughout the region. Theater programs, ranger-led programs, American cultural heritage performances and demonstrations, and Junior Ranger activities were scheduled throughout the day and provided a diversity of activities for visitors to experience. Hundreds of new National Park Service Junior Rangers were sworn in throughout the park and at a special ceremony in the amphitheater and were charged with taking care of America's treasured national parks into the future.

The 2010 Hometown Celebration showcased local and regional Black Hills talent and those qualities that make the Black Hills area such a popular destination. Presidential re-enactors Carl Closs (as George Washington), Fritz Klein (as Abraham Lincoln) and Gib Young (as Theodore Roosevelt) had a "bully of a time" as they captivated capacity audiences throughout the day. Phil Baker entertained young visitors with his lively children's' programs while Sequoia Crosswhite, Jasmine Pickner and the Germans from Russia excited and educated crowds with their unique talents which celebrated American cultural heritage. New recruits were sworn into the United States Air Force on stage by Ellsworth Air Force Base Commander Colonel Jeffrey Taliaferro, and sacrifice and civic responsibility were highlighted by Tim Giago and Dr. Dennis Edwards in the South Dakota Year of Unity program.

The evening's patriotic tribute to Millie Rexroat was an emotional high point to the event. A superbly timed B-1 Lancer Bomber from Ellsworth Air Force Base roared over the crowd with wings swept back before the Black Hills Symphony Orchestra delighted an amphitheater overflowing with visitors through dusk and into the dark and culminated in thundering ovation as the Memorial's popular colossal carving was illuminated to the Orchestra's rendition of "America the Beautiful". The ceremony echoed the larger focus of the day's celebration to the struggles and victories of independence in America.

"The United States' rich and diverse history of freedom and independence was showcased during today's Hometown Celebration. Mount Rushmore celebrated America's cultural heritage and

honored those who are protecting our freedoms," said Acting Superintendent Hugh Dougher. "This event proved how the Memorial and its partners can plan and deliver a well-attended celebration for all visitors safely and which reflects the true meaning of this important holiday and respects the National Park Service's mission to conserve our natural resources in manner to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. Today was a success because of the hundreds of hours that volunteers, memorial partners, and National Park Service employees from Mount Rushmore and other national parks spent making it possible. I am grateful to everyone who played a role in making this a safe and memorable celebration."

Attendance during the day's celebration significantly exceeded attendance during the July 3, 2009 event; over 20,000 visitors attended this year's celebration compared to the under 18,000 visitors last year. Thanks to creative and innovative planning by the Memorial and its event partners, more visitors experienced and enjoyed the celebration this year, with less congestion by offering an active schedule of diverse programs throughout the park which encouraged steady turnover of crowds in more public areas. No visitors were turned away from the park this year. Event coordinator Blaine Kortemeyer said, "This year's planning committee successfully met public demand for theme-related programs, attracted more visitors safely, and more effectively utilized park resources in a manner that was more sensitive to public and partner funding. We are proud of our success this year and pleased that so many visitors were able to experience the Independence Day celebration at Mount Rushmore."

The Independence Day celebration continued on July 4 with performers, re-enactors and demonstrations throughout the park beginning at 10:30 a.m. and leading up to the regularly scheduled Evening Program and sculpture illumination at 9:00 pm.

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